PLANTING A NEW LAWN:

SEED OR SOD?
The choice of seed or sod is one of patience versus budget. The preparation of the soil is the same for either. Sod lawns cost more, but can be used almost immediately. Also, sod lawns do best in full sun, and only one grass blend is available. With seed, you can get a superior lawn seed blend tailored to your specific needs. Sky Nursery’s seed mixes are carefully chosen blends of fescues and ryegrasses that perform particularly well in our Northwest climate.

Showcase Our best all-around mix for a durable, great-looking lawn.
Custom Shade Grows great in sun, but tolerates more shade than others.
Overseed Germinates quickly, blends well with existing turf. Durable varieties.

PLANTING A NEW LAWN (Best times: April, May, June, September, October)
Good soil preparation before planting is essential for your lawn’s long-term performance. To provide a good foundation for your new lawn, rototill generous amounts (2 to 4 inches) of compost into the existing soil. Rake the soil smooth, removing rocks and debris. Using a water roller, lightly compress the soil. If it’s not smooth, rake again.

Apply, in any order, the following: seed (7 pounds per 1000 square feet), lime, and starter fertilizer (follow the instructions on the bag). Cover this with a very thin (1/4” maximum) layer of screened compost to hide the seed from birds and create a moist germination layer. (EB Stone Top Coat combines very finely screened compost with a natural wetting agent; 1 bag covers 150 square feet.) Roll again with an empty roller. Keep moist for 2-4 weeks.

To plant sod, prepare the soil as above. Apply the fertilizer and lime to the soil before you lay down the sod. Be sure to stagger the end joints as you lay the sod out. Roll with an empty roller to ensure good contact. Rake or sweep lightly to raise the grass blades again. Then keep the new lawn moist for 2-4 weeks.

Mow the new lawn when it’s about 2-3 inches high. (Year-round mowing height should be 2-3 inches.) Fertilize with a regular lawn food (not a weed and feed) in about a month.

GRASS ALTERNATIVES
Sky Nursery carries two alternatives to traditional pure turf grass lawns: Envirolawn and clover (which can be planted alone or with turf grass). Once established, these alternatives are lower-maintenance than conventional lawns, requiring no fertilizer and less water and mowing. Both are more meadow like than conventional lawns, and the flowers will attract bees and other beneficial insects.

Envirolawn is a seed mix of turf grass (rye and fescue), strawberry clover, and wildflowers (English daisies, white yarrow, baby blue eyes, and white alyssum). It should be mowed to a height of 3-5" inches, and watered once or twice a month during our summer droughts.

Clover can be used as a stand-alone lawn substitute in low-traffic areas, or mixed with turf grass for a mixed grass/clover lawn that will be self-fertilizing. (Clover is a legume that captures nitrogen from the air, which can then fertilize neighboring plants as well.) White Dutch clover has long been used as a groundcover in orchards; micro-clover is its new mini relative, staying a better height to be a lawn replacement. Pure clover lawns may be mowed to prevent flowering, or left unmowed to provide bee forage.
LAWN MAINTENANCE:

LAWN WATERING
Most of the year, watering your lawn may not be necessary. Lawns need only 1 to 2 inches of water per week; during dry spells, you will need to provide that amount (or let your lawn go completely dormant.)

Setting your mowing height higher can reduce water needs by shading the ground and promoting deeper root growth. Improving your soil with extra compost can also promote deeper root growth and increased drought resistance.

If you use a sprinkler, use a wide shallow container to measure the water you’re putting on. Long slow soakings once or twice a week are best. If water seems to be running off rather than soaking in, aerating your lawn may help. Also, surfactants/wetting agents such as E-Z-Wet or Hydretain can help water penetrate deeply and then “wick” back up when needed.

LAWN FEEDING
When choosing lawn food, look for key words like organic, controlled (or slow) release, or water-insoluble. Granular (dry) fertilizers work better and longer than liquid ones. Some studies have indicated that organic fertilizers can help improve your lawn’s resistance to the fungus red thread. Fertilizer should never be applied to dry lawns and should always be thoroughly watered in. Apply at the rate recommended on the bag.

Fertilization frequency depends on what you want your lawn to look like. A minimum feeding schedule is twice per year (for example, in April and October). Best results are obtained by feeding approximately once each season (for example, Valentine’s Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving). The most important times to feed are fall and early spring (September, late November, & February)—those feedings support root growth, storing food for spring growth.

In addition to your lawn food, dolomite or calcitic lime should be applied once a year, preferably in early spring (around Valentine’s Day), at a rate of about 2-4 pounds per 100 square feet.

RESEEDING (Best times: April, May, June, September, October)
Before reseeding, thatch if necessary and aerate any hard compacted areas with a device that removes plugs of dirt. Mow the lawn about 30% shorter than normal. Fill in low spots with Sky Premium Planting Mix or Cedar Grove Lawn Performance Blend; if the depth of the fill is more than 2 inches, roll with a partially filled water roller to compact the soil. Apply seed, lime, and starter fertilizer, cover with finely screened compost, and thoroughly water. Treat the reseeded areas like a new lawn: keep moist for 2-4 weeks, fertilize again in about a month, and wait to mow until the new grass is 2 inches high.

GRASS CLIPPINGS
Since grass clippings are about 90% water and 9% fertilizer, leaving them on the lawn to decompose (grass-cycling) is beneficial if you do the following:

- Mow frequently enough to cut at most 1 inch on each mowing.
- Cut only when grass is dry (wet grass forms clumps on your lawn).
- Keep mower blades sharp so clippings are cut as small as possible.
- If you’re using a rotary mower, use a mulching blade.
SOLUTIONS TO COMMON LAWN PROBLEMS:
The best prevention for all lawn problems is a thick, healthy, consistently fed lawn. Sky recommends feeding 3-4 times a year with an organic lawn food. The recommended feeding schedule is Valentine’s Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day & Thanksgiving; the most important feedings are in the fall and early spring.

CRANEFLIES
The large mosquito-like insects seen in late summer are egg-laying adult craneflies. Eggs hatch into larvae (½” to 1 ½” gray-brown worms) that feed on turf grasses until cold weather drives them down into the soil where they stay dormant until spring. Damage appears as large irregularly-shaped dead areas, usually in April or May. Treatments can be applied in mid October (for best control) or early April. Beneficial nematodes and Bonide Captain Jack’s Spinosad can help to control craneflies organically, or there are chemical controls; consult a Sky sales associate.

DROUGHT
Grasses that do the best in the Puget Sound area are what are known as cool season turf grass. This means that as the summer heats up lawns will naturally go dormant unless watered. Water infrequently and deeply, giving your lawn 1 to 2 inches of water per week. If water seems to pool or run off, aerating and top dressing with compost can help make your soil more sponge-like. Surfactants can also help water penetrate more deeply to the roots; for best results apply in late spring and again in mid to late June.

Setting your mowing height higher can reduce water needs by shading the ground and promoting deeper root growth. Improving your soil with extra compost can also promote deeper root growth and increased drought resistance. Healthy turf will weather drought stress better, so make sure your grass starts the summer in good shape by following a good fertilizing and liming schedule. Do not fertilize with a fast-release (chemical) fertilizer if drought is anticipated! Fast-release fertilizer could encourage a growth spurt that would leave your turf susceptible to damage if watering is restricted.

GREENING UP A BROWN LAWN
The party’s Sunday—how do I get my lawn looking good FAST?? Sky carries several products that will help green-up a lawn quickly provided it is not completely dormant. Do not try to fertilize a dormant lawn (one that is already brown). The only thing that will revitalize a dormant lawn is water and time. If your lawn is not dormant, use a liquid or soluble fertilizer that you spray on. Sky does not recommend these in place of a regular (preferably organic) fertilizer program, but they are good for fast results.

MOSS
Moss in the lawn is a common, easily cured problem. It develops primarily where the grass is stressed for one or more of four reasons, and the best solution is to correct the underlying problem. If the moss growth is heavy, use a lawn moss killer in March. Rake out the dead moss two weeks later, and if needed reseed the bare patches. The four primary causes of moss, and their solutions, are as follows:

- **Low soil fertility**: fertilize regularly with good organic lawn food.
- **Soil too moist**: aerate yearly and topdress with compost or compost/sand mix; if necessary, correct any underlying drainage issue.
- **Soil too acid / low pH**: add dolomite or calcitic lime yearly every spring (preferred) or fall.
- **Too much shade**: limb-up trees; overseed with more shade tolerant turf grass such as Sky’s Custom Shade Blend; worst case, replace lawn with shade-loving groundcovers.
MUSHROOMS/FAIRY RING
Mushrooms do not harm your lawn or plantings; our first recommendation is to pick or mow them if they are objectionable. If necessary, Consan-20 may be used to kill them. You can also drench the area with a watering agent such as EZ-Wet. To apply, punch holes 4-6” deep about one foot apart throughout the affected areas. Thoroughly water in. For the next month, drench the area daily using about one to two quarts of water per square foot.

RED THREAD
Red thread is a common Northwest turf fungus spread by wind and rain during conditions of high humidity and cool weather when grass is growing slowly. It appears as areas of cream to pink fuzz over irregular patches of lawn. Organic fertilization has been shown in studies to help lawns resist red thread, and regular liming also helps. Although the disease is not fatal, it can make your grass look rather sad. The best treatment is to mow 30% shorter than usual (collect and dispose of clippings) and give the lawn a good application of organic fertilizer and lime to help it outgrow the fungus. Continue to feed every 30 to 60 days until the red thread is gone. When watering, long infrequent soakings are best. If chemical control is needed, see a Sky associate for recommendations.

THATCH
Over time some lawns develop a layer of old roots and grass stems between the grass and the soil surface called “thatch”. If this layer becomes too thick, water, air, and fertilizer cannot reach the grass roots and the lawn begins to thin out, especially in the summer. Grass on soil that is compacted, low in organic matter, or depleted of soil microorganisms by excessive chemical use is more susceptible to thatch buildup. Keeping your grass mowed to a uniform height (2-3”) year round and using an organic fertilizer can help prevent thatch from accumulating. If your soil is in good shape, grass blades do not contribute to thatch because they are 99% water and fertilizer. If you mow without a grass catcher, mow more frequently so that the cut blades are smaller, and keep your mower sharp.

If you do have a problem layer of thatch (over ¾ inch thick), remove it with a thatching rake or a power thatcher. For heavy buildups, cross-raking will be necessary. The lawn will look thin and sparse. Reseed to regenerate your lawn.

WEEDS
Many common lawn weeds (e.g. dandelions) thrive under conditions of low fertility, and can be reduced by consistent fertilization. Broadleaf weeds are best controlled by physical removal or (in summer) by a weed killer. Granular weed and feed products work on larger leaf weeds but not on small leaf plants like clover; liquid herbicides kill both. Most herbicides work best between 65°F and 75°F; never apply when temperatures are over 80°F. Bonide has developed a lawn weed killer, Weed Beater Ultra™, which is effective in cooler temperatures (down to 45°F). Follow label directions carefully, particularly regarding warnings, watering, and time before reseeding.

Weed grasses must be dug out or spot treated with a glyphosate product—which also kills surrounding turf grass. These spots may be reseeded immediately if dug or about ten days after herbicide treatment. Unfortunately, there is no product that kills undesirable grasses without also destroying desirable ones! For pre-emergent weed control, there are chemicals that disrupt seed germination. An organic equivalent is corn gluten. Corn gluten acts as an organic “weed & feed”; it feeds your existing grass while suppressing seed germination. Remember, though, any pre-emergent herbicide, including corn gluten, will not kill existing weeds. Moreover, they cannot be used in areas you will be reseeding (they prevent lawn seed germination as well). Two or three applications between October and May may be needed to control weed grasses like annual bluegrass (Poa annua).

OTHER PROBLEMS
For problems not covered, please talk to us at Sky Nursery and we can help you deal with them in an environmentally sound, cost-effective manner.